

## CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 1 April 2004.

**PRESENT:** Councillor J Jones (Chair), Councillor J Brunton (Vice Chair); Councillors McIntyre, J Taylor and A E Ward.

**OFFICIALS:** J Cooke, D Johnson, S Little, J Willis and J Yelder.

**\*\* PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Thomas Tolmie (Young Persons Representative).

**\*\* APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors B Taylor, P Thompsom and Mrs B Thompson (Executive Member for Social Care).

### **\*\* DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

### **\*\* MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2004 were submitted and approved as a correct record subject to the minor amendment identified on page one, second bullet point – should read “GNVQ” rather than “JNVQ”.

## **MIDDLESBROUGH'S RESPONSE TO MINISTERIAL GUIDANCE ON THE 'CANNING JUDGEMENT'**

The Head of Children's Services submitted a report to advise the Corporate Parenting Board of the guidance provided to Local Authorities following the recent 'Canning Judgement' (Review of Children's Cases LAC (2004) 5), and to outline the action to be taken by Middlesbrough's Social Services and the Council's Legal Service as a result of the guidance.

As background to the guidance issued it was reported that the Canning Judgement had been brought about following the conviction of Angela Canning for the murder of her child. Mrs Canning had lodged an appeal which, in January 2004, found in her favour.

The Judgement made clear that, in relation to sudden unexplained infant deaths in which the outcome of a criminal trial was dependent exclusively, or almost exclusively, on a serious disagreement between experts, it was unsafe to proceed with the case.

The Attorney General had announced the intention to consider 258 past convictions for the murder, manslaughter or infanticide of children under two years, to consider whether the Court decision had been unsafe.

In those cases where medical evidence was key, guidance had been issued to Local Authorities to review cases and generally, medical evidence would form just one aspect of the case.

The guidance which had been issued, together with Middlesbrough's response, was detailed in the report.

In summary, it was noted that a small legal and operational working group had been established to undertake the actions required in response to the Local Authority Circular "Review of Children's Cases". Initial work revealed no current cases where medical

evidence was an exclusive factor in decision making. Further work was required to ascertain the final position with regard to cases since 1986.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Board support the approach taken in response to the Guidance issued by the Minister for Children as outlined in the report.

## **MATCHING NEEDS AND SERVICES**

The Family Placement Development Officer submitted a report to advise the Board of the Matching Needs and Services Audit which had recently been completed.

It was reported that during the period April 2000 – March 2001, Middlesbrough Council had experienced a substantial increase in the number of children looked after. As a result a Matching Needs and Services Audit was conducted in July and August 2001 to examine what could be learned about the underlying reasons behind the increase. A continuation of the upward trend had been apparent since that period and consequently the exercise was repeated using data from the period April 2002 – March 2003.

The findings of the audit were fully detailed within the report and it was highlighted that during the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003, 124 children became looked after, with 66 children still being looked after on 31 March 2003. In terms of the age groups of children becoming looked after during that period, 46% were aged 0 – 4 years, 22% aged 5 – 10 years and 32% aged 11 – 17 years.

The Audit had been adapted from work done by the Dartington Social Research Unit. The basic details of all children who became looked after during a particular year were summarised and analysed then used to select a representative sample comprising of 60 children. The information on the audit forms was analysed to identify common needs and other factors which resulted in the sample being sorted into 12 groups.

The highest number of children becoming looked after, totalling 13, belonged to the group where there were major concerns over the parent(s) ability to meet their basic needs and where drug abuse was a major influence.

When the analysis from the 2000/01 audit was compared with the 2002/03 audit, the number of children who became looked after was very similar. It was further noted that the ages of the children becoming looked after was similar as were the categories of underlying needs.

From the Audit carried out in 2001, it was noted that the age profile of children becoming looked after had significantly changed since 1996 in that the percentage of younger children becoming looked after had increased. It was considered that the establishment of the Family and Adolescent Support Team had helped to reduce the number of older children becoming looked after.

The Board was advised that the final report of the Audit had been circulated to relevant staff in the Children and Families Teams and that a presentation would be delivered to staff in June. The report would also be circulated to relevant agencies involved in providing preventative services to children and families. The report would be included in the training programme for designated teachers.

Members considered that it would be beneficial for the report to be circulated throughout the Council and that the groupings could be used to identify the areas upon which the authority should focus.

**RECOMMENDED** as follows:-

1. That the content of the report be noted.
2. That the Board agree that the final report of the audit be circulated throughout the authority, to relevant agencies involved in providing preventative services to children and families and in staff briefings to relevant Children and Families staff.

## **PLACEMENT OPTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN**

The Family Placement Development Officer submitted a report setting out various possible options for increasing family placement provision for children over the age of 11 in a way which would reduce dependence on sport-purchase of out of area placements.

It was reported that significant investment had been made in the Family Placement Service since the introduction of the Quality Protects Programme in 1999. Whilst the number of Foster Carers had increased from 63 to 112, during the same period the number of children becoming looked after had also increased by approximately 30% in three years. It had been identified that the children most likely to require agency placements were those aged over 11 years.

The existing provision together with a summary of each option was detailed in the report.

A number of options were available for consideration in order to increase placement provision for older children as follows:-

- Enter into a contract with an independent fostering agency.
- Submit a joint bid with neighbouring local authorities for a Treatment Foster Care Scheme.
- Expand residential provision to include a type of Family Group Home, possibly run by Foster Carers.
- Expand existing Banded Payment Scheme for Foster Carers to offer experienced Foster Carers conditions which were comparable with independent agencies.
- Establish a fee-paid fostering scheme which was separate from the Banded Payment Scheme.

The options had been the subject of discussion within Social Services and the following options were being actively pursued:-

- Establishing a contract with an independent fostering agency
- Submitting a joint bid for funding for a Treatment Foster Care scheme.
- A review of the Banded Payment Scheme with active participation of Foster Carers.
- In conjunction with the above review, the option of a separate fee-paying scheme to be further considered.

It was noted that the option of establishing a Family Group Home was not being pursued as there were numerous difficulties in identifying a property, adapting it to meet registration requirements and identifying suitable people to provide the service.

During the ensuing discussion the following issues were raised:-

- In response to a query the Board was advised that the Treatment Foster Care Scheme provided intensive support to families and worked closely with the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service. The scheme was based on an intensive support and behaviour modification model in Oregon, USA, and would be funded

jointly by the PCTs and Local Authorities to establish a specialist team working across the Tees Valley. Each Local Authority would have two, single placements. Although the initial outlay to establish the scheme would be a significant sum, it was envisaged that it would become more cost effective in the longer term.

- In response to a question it was noted that no other Tees Valley Local Authorities operated the Family Group Home model.
- In response to a question, the Board was advised that Middlesbrough Fostering Service had not placed a recent advertisement for foster carers to provide homes for older children.

**RECOMMENDED** as follows:-

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That support be given to the proposed actions being taken to increase placement provision for children over 11 years of age.

## **THE CHILDREN BILL**

The Head of Children's Services submitted a report informing Members of the legislative changes contained within the Children Bill published on 8 March 2004.

In Autumn 2003, the 'Every Child Matters' Green Paper was issued as a consultation document to which Middlesbrough Council had responded positively to the proposals concerning the development of Children's Services.

It was reported that the Children Bill and accompanying document 'Every Child Matters: Next Steps' put into effect the legislative changes required to implement the Green Paper.

The Bill reflected the outcome of consultation as follows:-

- Less focus on structural change – the Bill did not mention the Children's Trust Model, but moved to 'integrated commissioning'.
- Extended timescales for change to enable a 'sensible transition'.
- Flexibility for Local Authorities regarding precise functions which would be responsible to the new Director of Children's Services.

The proposals contained within the Children Bill were outlined in the report and the key headings were highlighted as follows:-

- Children's Commissioner
- Duty to co-operate and make partnership arrangements
- Safeguarding Arrangements
- Information sharing/databases
- Director of Children's Services
- Lead Member for Children's Services
- Intervention
- Duty to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children
- Private Fostering
- Children's Trusts

The Board was advised that a number of small pilots were currently underway to develop protocols for sharing information and establishing databases before the proposed wider system was rolled out.

During the ensuing discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Following Member attendance at a conference addressed by the Minister for Children, Young People and Families, Margaret Hodge, it was noted with pleasure that Middlesbrough is well ahead in responding to the Children Bill compared with other authorities. The importance of ensuring that all elected Members and all School Governors were aware of their responsibilities as Corporate Parents was emphasised.
- In response to a question, the Board was advised that the requirement to register private fostering arrangements had been advertised.

**RECOMMENDED** as follows:-

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Bill's content and new duties placed on Authorities and agencies be noted.

### **EVERY CHILD MATTERS – CONSULTATION SESSION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

With the agreement of the Chair, Thomas Tolmie, Young Person's Representative, provided the Board with information on the outcome of a consultation session for young people on the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters', which had been held during Local Democracy Week. The Group, consisting of four young people and officers from Social Services, discussed each of the Government's consultation questions and prioritised their ideas arising from the discussion.

A total of nine consultation questions had been put to the group as follows:-

- How can the local Council make sure you have a say in improving things for children and young people?
- What other activities would you like to see happen in your school?
- If you were in charge of the 'Young People's Fund' how would you spend the money?
- How can the Government help families during tough times?
- How can we encourage more people to become foster carers and make sure they feel good about fostering?
- When is it OK for professionals to talk about a young person without their permission?
- If children and families need extra help, what can we do to help them speak up?
- How can we encourage more people to work with children and families in social work or childcare?
- Any other comments about services for children and young people?

The Board requested copies of the document which detailed the priorities identified by the young people and the discussion that had taken place.

The Head of Inclusion was in attendance at the meeting and considered it would be useful to incorporate some of the comments made in the document into the Behaviour Support Plan currently being finalised.

The Board was advised that wider consultation with young people in relation to information sharing was currently taking place and that this would be reported in due course.

**RECOMMENDED** as follows:-

1. That the information provided be noted.
2. That a copy of the Young People's Consultation Document on the Government's Green Paper, Every Child Matters, be distributed to Members of the Corporate Parenting Board.
3. That the Head of Inclusion incorporate some of the comments made at the Young People's Consultation Session into the Behaviour Support Plan.

### **SOCIAL WORK TEAMS/CREATION OF 'LOOKED AFTER' TEAM**

The Head of Children's Services submitted a report concerning the reconfiguration of Social Work Teams and associated implications for Children Looked After Services.

Following internal audits, a number of practice issues and broader service changes emerged during 2003 regarding children's social work teams. Key issues for the Service to address were listed in the report and the following were listed specifically in relation to Children Looked After Services:-

- Standards relating to Social Work visiting frequency not being consistently met.
- Foster carers and other professionals had difficulty in contacting or sharing information with the Social Worker.
- Looked After Reviews not consistently completed within the prescribed timescales (70% within timescale).
- Limited placement choice due to high numbers of children looked after. This had resulted in an increase in young people placed out of the area and also increased instability of placements.
- Completion of Health Assessments not consistently completed within prescribed timescales.
- Children 'Looked After' under-achieved educationally.
- Personal Education Plans were not consistently completed or reviewed.

It was proposed to create a Children Looked After Team to address the concerns identified. It was envisaged this would be achieved by reducing to one Assessment Team and developing the four Family Support Teams, currently in existence, as locality teams. It was proposed that the Team should be part of a 'Looked After Unit' managed by a Service Manager and linked directly to Health and Education Services.

In response to a question, the Board was advised that when the changes had initially been proposed some time ago, the Social Work Teams had rejected the proposals, however, following information gathering exercises and briefing sessions the Teams had taken a positive approach and welcomed the changes. It was expected that the changes would take effect from 1 May 2004.

In response to a question, the Board was advised that the rate of completion of Personal Education Plans had already improved significantly but that further steps would be taken to improve systems for the monitoring and review of the plans.

### **RECOMMENDED** as follows:-

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the changes outlined in the report be noted and that support be given to the creation of a Children Looked After Team.